

## **KERA Initiative Summary**

**4/29/04**

### **Building A Strong Foundation for School Success – The Kentucky State-Funded Preschool Program**

The Kentucky State-Funded Preschool program was established in 1990 as part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act to make sure that all children have the opportunity to succeed in school when they enter the primary program. This preschool program is designed to reduce barriers to learning for four-year-old children who qualify for free lunch and three- and four-year-old children with disabilities, regardless of income. Districts are encouraged through statute to serve other four-year-olds as placements are available and through local funds or other resources.

#### **Program Requirements for Children and Families:**

- ♦ a minimum half-day (2 ½ hours) developmentally appropriate preschool education program
- ♦ a minimum of two home visits a year
- ♦ child development screening and health screenings, including vision and hearing
- ♦ collaboration with medical, health, mental health and social service agencies
- ♦ parent involvement activities
- ♦ one meal each day
- ♦ bus monitors present on the bus when transportation is provided

#### **Program Requirements for Local School Districts:**

- ♦ Collaboration with existing community services including First Steps, child care and Head Start
- ♦ Signed assurances for preschool program operation through the Comprehensive District Improvement Plan
- ♦ Submission of Program Reports: State Child Count, Supplemental Threes Child Count, Program Summary and Preschool Performance Report to the Kentucky Department of Education

Beyond the basic program requirements, preschool programs continually strive for high program quality. High quality preschool programs promote learning and development through attention to: knowing how young children develop and learn; the physical environment; programming and schedule as well as interactions between children and adults, children and their peers and children and their environment.

#### **Evidence of a High Quality Preschool Program:**

##### **♦Promoting Learning and Development**

##### **☆Intellectual Development:**

- ample time for exploring
- extension of “play” and opportunities for thinking and reasoning skills to be developed

- engagement in activities and learning from all content areas – reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, etc.
- language and literacy promotion of reading stories aloud, encouraging children to talk about their work, and creating an environment rich in print

☆Social Development:

- learning to respect others, despite differences
- a sense of community within the classroom
- learning strategies to resolve conflicts
- stimulating opportunities and materials for children to use during cooperative play

☆Large-Motor Development:

- opportunities for well-supervised physical activity
- dancing to music, exercise and activities that promote coordination included daily

☆Small-Motor Development:

- a great variety of materials at various levels of development for the development of small-motor dexterity

☆Language Development:

- language skills developed by listening to and speaking with adults
- encouragement of individual child conversations
- respecting children's frequent talking out loud to themselves while playing
- rhymes, songs and finger plays as a part of daily adult-child interaction

## State and National Research

Both Kentucky and national research provide us with information concerning the results of high quality preschool programming. National research verifies that there are fewer dropouts, less remediation and referrals to special education, fewer incarcerations and ultimately less funds expended when investment of dollars at the preschool level occurs. Longitudinal research by the University of Kentucky (UK) confirms that children who attended the Kentucky Preschool Program “caught up” with their peers who were not eligible. The UK report also found the following results in a study of Kentucky's state-funded preschool program:

- ♦ Economically disadvantaged children who attended the program did as well as children who were not disadvantaged (not income-eligible) on entry into the primary program.
- ♦ Participants were significantly better prepared for entering the primary program than were their peers who were eligible for but did not attend the program.
- ♦ Preschoolers with disabilities who attended the program improved in areas where they needed the most help. Some of the preschoolers with disabilities gained as much as one month of development for one month in the program, even though all of these children had significant delays in development in order to be eligible to enroll in the program.

- ♦ Program quality was consistent across individual classrooms around the state, with classrooms generally scoring at or above average in quality.

In *The State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook*, a report produced by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), Kentucky fared well in several areas. Overall, Kentucky met 7 of the 10 benchmarks for access, quality and resources. No state met all 10 benchmarks; however, three states met nine of the ten: Arkansas, Illinois and the Abbott Project in New Jersey. Kentucky ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation for access for three-year-old-children, 7<sup>th</sup> for access for four-year-olds and 21<sup>st</sup> in the nation for resources (funding, per-child spending).

### **Trends in Funding and Enrollment**

Since 1993-94, there has been a shortfall in state preschool funds due to actual enrollment. Kentucky's state-funded preschool program is growing. In 2003-2004, 95 out of 176 districts (54%) experienced preschool enrollment growth of more than five percent. Last year 89 districts (51%) experienced growth. In 2003-2004, the growing districts added 1,388 children. The result is a trend of increasing numbers of state-funded preschool children. Regardless of the preschool funding rates, districts must make services available to eligible children, particularly due to federal requirements for children with disabilities.

### **Training Resources**

Five early childhood regional training centers (RTCs) provide statewide preschool training and technical assistance to district preschool program staff, entry-level primary teachers, Head Start and private program staff.

***Statutory References:*** KRS 157.3175, 157.226